

PRESIDENTS

DRAWER 10

ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS

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Abraham Lincoln's Administrative Problems

Former Presidents

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

FORMER PRESIDENTS AS PRIVATE CITIZENS

STORY OF THEIR CAREERS
AFTER LEAVING HIGH OFFICE.

FATES EXTREMELY VARIED

[Rene Bache, in Philadelphia Ledger]

People are much interested in what Mr. Woodrow Wilson will do with himself after his departure from the White House, March 4.

"The most wretched situation in the world is that of a former President," said Mr. Cleveland, at the end of his first term. But this view does not bear analysis, inasmuch as a number of our Presidents have pursued existence actively and usefully after leaving the office.

The specter of poverty has haunted the last days of four former Presidents—Jefferson, Monroe, Jackson and Grant; but such a thing is impossible in these times, when the mere fact of being a former President is worth \$50,000 a year to any man.

Consider the case of Benjamin Harrison, after he left the White House, he could demand and get \$10,000 for acting as advocate in a single case. The government paid him \$100,000 in a lump for one job which he would have been glad to undertake a few years earlier for a twentieth part of that sum.

Cleveland was a poor man when he came to the White House. But when he left it, after his first term, one of the biggest and most prosperous law firms in New York offered him a partnership, and refereeships gave a rapid bulge to his bank account.

A number of former Presidents have taken up literature. John Adams, after his retirement, collected historical data. Grant, struggling in a lingering death agony, wrote his memoirs to furnish money for his family. Harrison and Cleveland did magazine work at good prices, \$500 to \$1,000 an article. The stuff they furnished was worth the money, because they were former Presidents, if not for any other reason. Roosevelt was a skilled writer; indeed, literature was his profession; but it was also for the sake of the advertising that magazines paid him large salaries.

Eight Presidents Wealthy.

The Leland Stanford University paid Benjamin Harrison \$10,000 a year for a dozen lectures annually—not before, but after he was President. When he died his estate was worth \$375,000. Roosevelt left half a million.

Cleveland at the time of his death was worth considerably more than half a million. Most of his money, however, was made through the "unearned increment" of land values. He bought real estate in the outskirts of Washington; a boom in land arrived opportunely, and he sold at an immense profit. When Chicago gas was cheap he bought a lot of it by the advice of his friend, E. C. Benedict, and gained a fortune thereby.

Eight of our Presidents were men of wealth when they took the office—Washington, Madison, John Quincy Adams, Van Buren, Polk, Fillmore, Pierce and Buchanan. Cleveland left the White House rich at the end of his second term, and Roosevelt, who was always well off, having inherited a fortune from his father, a glass importer, became much wealthier before he died.

Washington left at least half a million, being at the time of his death perhaps the richest man in the United States. In his day the Mt. Vernon estate covered 8,000 acres, or twelve and a half square miles, and embraced a number of farms on which grain, tobacco and blooded stock were produced. Its owner was a shrewd manager, and extracted the largest possible money return from the property,

rising every morning at daybreak and riding many miles through the plantations.

John Quincy Adams owned much valuable real estate in Boston, and also in what is today the principal shopping center of Washington, on Pennsylvania avenue and F street. He was nearly sixty years old when he left the White House, and his intention was to devote the rest of his life to bookish pursuits; but the folk at home in Quincy, Mass., asked him if he would not consent to serve them as a representative in congress, and he replied that he would consider it an honor to be chosen as selectman by vote of the people. Thus it was that he took up a new career in the national legislature, which terminated only with his death.

Collected Salary All at Once

Van Buren was so well off that he did not bother to collect his salary while in the White House, but paid all expenses out of his own private purse, allowing the pay to accumulate, and drawing the \$100,000—Presidents got only \$25,000 per annum in those days—at the end of his four years' term. He then went back to his home in Kinderhook, on the Hudson, where he died in 1862, having lived long enough to see his country in the throes of a civil war which he had often predicted before and during the presidency.

James K. Polk, while by no means so well to do as Van Buren, left considerable property. From the White House he went back to his home in Nashville, somewhat broken in health, and died a few months later. The immediate cause of his death, however, was Asiatic cholera, which attacked him on returning from New Orleans and a tour of the south.

Millard Fillmore, being a man of means, undertook no business occupation after relinquishing the presidency, beyond the handling of estates that were in his charge. He retained his interest in politics and traveled extensively abroad. His last years, spent at home in Buffalo, were he declared, the most enjoyable of his life, which ended in 1874.

Franklin Pierce spent his last years uneventfully in Concord, N. H. Possessing a considerable fortune, business had no attractions for him, and he was content to be "on the shelf." With James Buchanan the case was much the same. At his home, called Wheatlands, near Lancaster, Pa., he passed his latter days in complete retirement, a prey to melancholy.

Buchanan, Pierce, Madison and John Adams might be called the four hermit ex-Presidents, so close was their retirement. Adams was an old man when he left the White House (which he was first to occupy), yet lived on for a quarter of a century and long enough to see his son in the presidential chair.

Left Washington in a Huff

So chagrined was he at his defeat by Jefferson that he left Washington in a huff at daybreak on March 4, refusing to meet his rival and successor. Thus escaping the formality of welcoming the latter, he boarded the cannonball stage for Quincy, where he spent the remainder of his life, surrounded by his books, emerging from his library only to eat and sleep. He continued, nevertheless, to wield some influence in public affairs, carrying on an extensive correspondence; and on one occasion he did come out of his hole to attend as delegate, in 1820, a state convention.

John Adams was not an amiable character. He was jealous of Franklin and envious of Washington, often declaring that he had "made" the latter. It is a curious coincidence that he died on the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, and that on the same day death summoned Jefferson, with whom he had been associated in drafting the historic document.

Six ex-Presidents—Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Jackson, Johnson and Hayes—became planters or farmers. After the father of his country had gone back to Mount Vernon, Nellie Curtis wrote to a friend that he was exceedingly content to be once more Farmer Washington. He died from an attack of acute laryngitis in the last month of the eighteenth century, two years and nine months after the inauguration of John Adams, his successor.

The oldest President at the date of his inauguration was the elder Harrison, who was sixty-eight. The youngest, Theodore Roosevelt, was

forty-three. The average age of all the Presidents when inducted into office was fifty-three.

Polk, Garfield and Arthur died at fifty. Monroe, Tyler, Fillmore, Hayes and Cleveland passed the mark of three-score and ten. Jefferson, Madison and Van Buren were the four-score line. John Adams was ninety-one years old when he died.

John Adams, Madison and Monroe died of old age, though the last named ex-President was only seventy-three when the grim destroyer claimed him. Paralysis killed John Quincy Adams, Fillmore and Johnson. Arthur died of apoplexy; Andrew Jackson of consumption and dropsy; Grant of cancer of the throat. Cholera morbus, after eating cherries and iced milk, carried off Zachary Taylor.

Two Ex-Presidents in Congress.

On January 1, 1862, there were five living ex-Presidents—Van Buren, Tyler, Fillmore, Pierce and Buchanan. The second and sixth Presidents were father and son; the ninth and twenty-third were grandfather and grandson.

Two ex-Presidents have served in the federal congress. John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson.

We have had two fat men as tenants of the White House, Taft and Cleveland; but the former has pared down his physique markedly since he became an "ex," and the latter before he died lost most of his superfluous adipose tissue.

It is safe to say that no President was ever otherwise than sorry to leave the White House—a remark which, of course, does not apply to Washington, inasmuch as he never occupied the mansion. Five men—Van Buren, Fillmore, Grant, Cleveland and Roosevelt—tried hard to get back. Of these Cleveland alone succeeded.

Van Buren pulled wires for a re-nomination, but failed, as it was said, through the treachery of men he trusted. His acceptance of the free soil nomination in 1848 ended his public career. Fillmore was nominated in 1856 by the Know Nothing party, and defeated. Grant's tremendous effort for a third term is well remembered by people who have not yet had time to become grandfathers.

When Thomas Jefferson retired from the presidency and returned to Monticello he was much in debt, though at the time the fact was not known to most of his friends. He emulated the example of Washington by trying to be a farmer, but was so far unsuccessful that each year he ran more behind financially. In the meantime he was keeping open house, entertaining lavishly and sometimes having as many as fifty guests.

At length his affairs got into such bad shape that he was compelled to ask the congress to buy his library and historical papers, which were thereupon sold to the nation for \$28,000. These books and papers now form one of the most valuable possessions of the Library of Congress. The money tided Jefferson over for a while, but he was bankrupt when he died, seventeen years after his departure from the White House. To the day of his death he took an active interest in public affairs. He established the University of Virginia, serving as its first provost, and personally superintended the erection of its buildings.

Madison Became a Recluse

Mention has been made of James Madison as one of the four ex-Presidents who became hermits. After leaving Washington he sought retirement on his estate in Virginia, which was of baronial size (in Orange county), and lived there a secluded life for nineteen years. He was practically a recluse, delegating the care of all his business and other affairs to members of his family. His widow, the much-loved Dolly, went back to Washington to live, occupying the house that is now the home of the Cosmos Club, only a block from the White House. Her husband left her comfortably well off, but a worthless son squandered her money, and she was hard put to it for means before she died.

James Monroe, on becoming an "ex," retired to a farm at Oakwood Hill, in Virginia. Being embarrassed by debts, he moved thence to New York, where he opened a law office. Unfortunately, the market for ex-Presidents at that period was not what it is today, and he was not very successful. Probably worry hastened

his death, which occurred half a dozen years later.

John Quincy Adams, having accepted an election to the house of representatives, became a leader of his party in that body. After nineteen years of service as a congressman, his death came suddenly and rather dramatically. Members sitting near him saw him fall over upon his desk; the house adjourned, and he was carried into an adjoining room, where he passed away. A brass star set in the marble floor of Statuary Hall, which in Adams's time was the chamber of the house, marks the spot where he sat. He was eighty-one years old.

Andrew Jackson withdrew to the Hermitage, his home near Nashville, whence his great influence continued to direct to a considerable extent the policies of his party. He entertained a great deal, and the house became a Mecca for members of his political faith until his death, eight years later.

Grew Intensely Religious.

Toward the end of his life, he grew intensely religious, and frequently declared that he had forgiven all his enemies, as he himself hoped to be forgiven. He had certainly been a man of wrath, a duelist, and a bitter foe to many whom he

hated and who hated him. Nearly all of his property had to go to pay the debts of an adopted son, so that he left almost nothing, though his will bequeathed one slave to each member of his family, including his grandchildren.

John Tyler went back to Richmond, which was his home. He had strongly favored the maintenance of the Union, and had presided over the peace congress which met in Washington early in 1861; but, when Virginia seceded, he went with his state, siding with the Confederacy and becoming a member of the Confederate congress.

Andrew Johnson returned to Knoxville, where, as a former President, he lived for six years in democratic simplicity among his old neighbors. With a farm, a mill, a country store and other interests, he managed to keep himself sufficiently occupied. But he had an ambition to get back into the political game, and, after one or two unsuccessful attempts, managed to obtain an election to the United States senate. He died less than a year later, having served only a few days of an extra session.

Ulysses S. Grant, on retiring from the presidency, was of a mind to devote the rest of his days to leisure and his friends. He made a trip around the world, which has been described in two published volumes. On coming back he undertook to interest himself in business affairs, not actively, but in the way of investment. Unfortunately, he had no knowledge of business, and, to make good his losses, he was obliged to pawn for \$100,000 his collection of swords, medals and valuable memorabilia, including gifts from foreign potentates, collected abroad. William H. Vanderbilt lent him the money and afterward gave the collection (which the hero of Appomattox was unable to redeem) to the National Museum in Washington, where it is now preserved.

Hayes Managed a Farm.

Two of our Presidents have been afflicted with cancer. Grant died of it at Mt. McGregor and his body now lies in a magnificent tomb on Riverside drive in New York. Cleve-

land, while in the White House, was attacked by a cancerous affection of the jaw. Nothing was said about the matter. It was one of the best-kept secrets in history and was not revealed until long after his death. Mr. Cleveland ostensibly went for a trip on Commodore Benedict's yacht, and while he was aboard an operation was performed, the malignant growth being removed. Nobody could tell that it might not reappear, with fatal results, as such tumors commonly do, but happily it never did.

Rutherford B. Hayes on his departure from the White House resigned himself to what he called a "delightful retirement." He managed a farm at Spiegel Grove, near Fremont, O., and interested himself in charitable and benevolent enterprises. He was a well-off man and under no necessity to toil.

Chester A. Arthur was considered in his day the handsomest man in Washington, being still on the sunny side of fifty during his presidency. He was popular, generally liked and gave famous dinners. Probably no occupant of the White House was ever more confident of succeeding himself. Nevertheless, he lost the job, and was a greatly disappointed man.

He went to New York and made arrangements for a law partnership. Also, he contemplated some investments in real estate in the upper part of Manhattan island, which probably would have made him a multi-millionaire later on if he had lived; and he was elected president of a corporation organized to carry out what most people thought a very absurd and chimerical scheme—namely, to dig a subway for traffic under the streets of New York.

Just then, however, his health gave way, and he was found dead in his bed one morning, less than a year after he turned over the presidential office to Mr. Cleveland.

Ex-Presidents seem to be liable to the same fortunes and misfortunes as other and ordinary folk. Some have been rich, others have been poor. Some have been happy after leaving the White House, others contrariwise. Their fates have been extremely varied. But one thing may be said is, that nowadays any ex-President can command—though Mr. Taft has never exerted himself in that direction—a big income.

LINCOLN LORE

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PRESIDENTS LIVING WHEN LINCOLN WAS INAUGURATED

Six Presidents of the United States were living in 1861 when the Union was on the verge of collapse. They were: The Eighth President, Van Buren, age 79; the Tenth President, Tyler, age 71; the Thirteenth President, Fillmore, age 61; the Fourteenth President, Pierce, age 57; the Fifteenth President, Buchanan, age 70; and the Sixteenth President, Lincoln, age 52.

It was shortly after Lincoln's inauguration that the country came near having a President's Club. Franklin Pierce wrote to the other former presidents in March, 1861, suggesting that "they get together in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, to try and devise means to avert Civil War." It was in this hall that Abraham Lincoln, a few days previous to this special call by Pierce, had spoken these words:

"I have often inquired of myself what great principle or idea it was that kept this Confederacy so long together. It was not the mere matter of separation of the colonies from the motherland, but that sentiment in the Declaration of Independence which gave liberty not alone to the people of this country, but hope to all the world, for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights would be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance. This is the sentiment embodied in the Declaration of Independence. Now, my friends, can this country be saved on that basis? If it can, I will consider myself one of the happiest men in the world if I can help to save it. If it cannot be saved upon that principle, it will be truly awful. But if this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle, I was about to say I would rather be assassinated on this spot than surrender it. Now, in my view of the present aspect of affairs, there is no need of such a course; and I may say in advance that there will be no bloodshed unless it is forced upon the government. The government will not use force, unless force is used against it."

President Pierce's proposal for a meeting of the past presidents evidently failed to materialize and an opportunity to organize America's first President's Club went by default. It would have been a short-lived club at the best, as five of the six men eligible for membership were dead within the next eight years. It will be observed that Lincoln was the youngest of the group which may have suggested to the older heads that the youngster might appreciate some fatherly advice.

THE PRESIDENTS

1782—Martin Van Buren—1862

Eighth President

Senator in New York Legislature, 1813-1820.
Attorney General, State of New York, 1815-1819.
Democratic United States Senator, 1821-1828.
Governor of New York, 1828-1829.
Secretary of State in Jackson's Cabinet, 1829-1831.
Democratic Vice President of United States, 1832-1836.
Democratic President of United States, 1837-1841.

1790—John Tyler—1862

Tenth President

Democratic United States Congressman, 1817-1821.
Governor of Virginia, 1825-1827.
Democratic United States Senator, 1827-1836.
Whig Vice President of United States, 1841.
Whig President of United States, 1841-1845.
Elected to Confederate Congress, 1861.

1800—Millard Fillmore—1874

Thirteenth President

Representative in New York Legislature, 1829-1831.
Whig United States Congressman, 1833-1835, 1837-1843.
Whig Vice President of United States, 1849.
Whig President of United States, 1850-1853.

1804—Franklin Pierce—1869

Fourteenth President

Representative in New Hampshire Legislature, 1829-1833.
Democratic United States Senator, 1837-1842.
Democratic President of United States, 1853-1857.

1791—James Buchanan—1868

Fifteenth President

Representative in Pennsylvania Legislature, 1814-1815.
Federalist United States Congressman, 1821-1831.
Minister to Russia, 1832-1834.
Democratic United States Senator, 1834-1845.
Secretary of State in Polk's Cabinet, 1845-1849.
Minister to Great Britain, 1853-1856.
Democratic President of United States, 1857-1861.

1809—Abraham Lincoln—1865

Sixteenth President

Representative in Illinois Legislature, 1834-1842.
Whig United States Congressman, 1847-1848.
Republican President of United States, 1861-1865.
Union President of United States, 1865.

This group of six presidents who would save the Union from civil strife were evenly divided as far as political affiliations were concerned; three were Democrats and three had originally been associated with the Whigs. If the incumbent, Lincoln, had not been invited to the contemplated conference, it would have been three Democrats over against two Whigs. It is interesting to note to what extent these presidents participated in the affairs of the government during the trying times through which the country was then passing.

Van Buren lived but a short time after the administration of Lincoln was well under way. He died on July 24, 1862. He had been the anti-slavery candidate for the President in 1848, running on an anti-slavery platform, but was defeated.

John Tyler lived but ten months after Lincoln was inaugurated, but in that brief period he had given unmistakable evidence as to his point of view. He was a delegate to the peace convention in 1861; a delegate to the Confederate Provisional Congress in 1861; and was elected to the Confederate Congress the same year, but died January 24, 1862, before the assembling of the congress at Richmond.

When Lincoln was enroute to Washington for the inaugural in 1861, Fillmore entertained him in his home at Buffalo, and on Sunday, February 17, they attended church together. Although Fillmore was sixty-one years of age when the war began, he commanded a corps of home guards during the war.

Franklin Pierce, in his inaugural address on March 4, 1853, denounced slavery agitation and maintained the constitutionality of slavery. He selected Jefferson Davis as Secretary of War in his cabinet, and Davis served for four years. James Buchanan was made Minister to Great Britain during his administration. Pierce held that "the institution of slavery was embedded in and guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, and that therefore it was the duty of the National Government to protect it. In the 1860 election he favored Breckinridge over Douglas. On April 21, 1865, he addressed a mass meeting at Concord, New Hampshire, and urged the people to sustain the Government against the Confederacy.

After his successor, Abraham Lincoln, was inaugurated, Buchanan returned to his home at Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He took little active part in national affairs, but supported as a private citizen the maintenance of the war for the preservation of the Union.

[TALES OF THE PUNJAB Told by the People. By Flora Annie Steele. (Illustrated by R. K.'s father, J. Lockwood Kipling.) 1894. \$2.50] *AT GOOD-SPEED'S*

WEE WILLIE WINKIE [etc.] and Other Stories. 1895. \$2

NO PEACE IN '61

PRESIDENT JOHN TYLER left the White House in 1845 and spent the next sixteen years in retirement as master of his Virginia estate, "Sherwood Forest." The rumbling of the political thunder which shook the nation in the winter of 1861 brought him out of private life with the proposal that representatives of the border states meet in convention to find compromises by which shooting war might be avoided. The Virginia Assembly made the counter-proposal that all states be represented, and such a convention did meet in Washington in February.

John Tyler was named President of the convention, which, sad to say, failed. The following month Tyler was a member of the Virginia convention which declared for secession. When war came he urged a quick offensive, the occupation of Washington, and the appropriation of both the name and the old flag of the Federal Union. He served in the provisional Congress of the Confederacy and was elected to the Confederate House of Representatives, but died before taking his seat. John Tyler's DABiographer says, "His memory has been dimmed by the writings of historians who find a record of courageous consistency bewildering."

A monument to the memory of John Tyler's statesmanly effort to save the Union of which he had once been chief executive is a sheaf of letters and documents which survived the abortive peace convention of February '61. This sheaf consists of about eighty pieces, manuscript and printed, including copies of the printed broadside which presents Tyler's proposal of "Certain Amendments to the Constitution of the United States." With the broadsides is an autograph letter by Tyler, beginning: "Here is my suggestion thrown into form. I can-

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not but regard it as important. It avoids propagandism and secures us in our territories." The nature of Tyler's proposals and clues to the likelihood of their being acceptable to the delegates are to be found in the paragraph with which he introduces them:

"The following proposed amendments to the Constitution of the United States are based on the Missouri Compromise, and the plan of adjustment of Messrs. Crittenden and Douglas. They not only avoid the *recognition of slavery as existing* in the territory south of the line of 36° 30' north latitude, and also its *protection* by all the departments of the territorial Government, as defined by the Crittenden proposition, but simply provide that *when or where existing*, south of such line, neither Congress nor a Territorial Government shall ever interfere with or abolish it. Like the Missouri Compromise, they contain a provision for the reclamation of fugitives. They also enable Congress to make such laws as may protect from violence or improper interference the rights of persons holding slaves south of such line. In this way, they define *what kind of protection* shall be afforded, and thus attempt to obviate the objection of the Republican party to the broad and indefinite ground of protection as proposed by the Crittenden Compromise. The author of these resolutions has endeavored to find a common platform, on which all parties, except the abolitionists of slavery, can stand without any abandonment of principle; a platform based on the Missouri Compromise, and containing what it would seem ought to be acceptable to the South. It would be desirable, if possible, to absolve Congress from all legislation on the subject of slavery, but it is not seen how the South will be satisfied unless there are some means adopted for protecting the just rights of parties from violence or border raids. This it is believed will be a small matter to leave to Congress, and can be provided for as exigency may require."

In the sheaf are the official appointments of delegates to the convention from many states, some printed and others in manuscript, some formal and some offhand, signed by governors or their state subordinates, and here and there is the bright color of a state seal. Here also is a manuscript list of delegates, some of the resolutions which they submitted and their letters of comment to Tyler, press clippings, and a miscellany which includes the printed linen badge worn by the delegates. The

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signature of John Tyler also appears on several printed slips dated at the convention, February 11, and certifying that so-and-so was a delegate. AT GOOD-
SPEED'S

If the Virginia-inspired peace convention had succeeded in averting the irrepressible conflict, it would now be looked on as a major historical landmark. Since it failed, it has the wistful significance of all good lost causes. The collection of about eighty pieces—\$85.



Lincoln Lore

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Mary Jane Hubler, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the
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FIVE EX-PRESIDENTS WATCHED THE LINCOLN ADMINISTRATION

Presidents who retire from office are expected to become "elder statesmen." Former President Richard M. Nixon seems currently to be bidding for that status by promising to speak occasionally "in non-political forums." He will stress foreign policy, he says, because partisanship is supposed to end at America's shores. He promises to be above the partisan battles of the day; he will become an elder statesman.

In Lincoln's day, Presidents who left office did not automatically assume the status of elder statesmen. The five surviving ex-Presidents in 1861 — Martin Van Buren, John Tyler,

Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, and James Buchanan — did have enough reputation for being above the party battles for it to be suggested more than once that they meet to find remedies for the secession crisis. That such a meeting never took place is eloquent testimony to the weakness of the non-partisan ideal in the nineteenth century. The broad public did not regard these men — and the ex-Presidents did not regard each other — as passionless Nestors well on their way to becoming marble statues. They proved, in fact, to be fiercely partisan.



From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. Lincoln met two former Presidents shortly before his inauguration in 1861. Millard Fillmore greeted him in Buffalo, New York, and he met the incumbent, James Buchanan, twice in Washington. Reporters indicated that in both cases Lincoln chatted amiably, but no one knows the subjects of their conversations.

It was an irony that John Tyler came nearest to assuming an official status as a nonpartisan adjudicator in a conference meant to reconcile the sections, for he would later demonstrate the greatest partisan difference from the Lincoln administration of any of the former Presidents. By November of 1860, Tyler already thought it too late for a convocation of representatives of all the states to arrive at a compromise settlement which would save the Union. He did recommend a meeting of "border states" which would bear the brunt of any sectional war in the event a compromise was not reached. New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri could at least arrange a peaceful separation of the South if they could not keep the Union together. Tyler's proposal never bore fruit, but, when the Virginia General As-

sembly proposed a peace conference of all states in Washington for February, 1861, Tyler became one of Virginia's five commissioners at the convention. The delegates in Washington elected Tyler president of the conference unanimously, but the convention was so divided in voting on recommendations that it was largely ignored by Congress. Tyler returned to Virginia and became an advocate of secession. When urged to lead a compromise movement after the fall of Fort Sumter in the spring, Tyler thought it hopeless. Lincoln, he said, "having weighed in the scales the value of a mere local Fort against the value of the Union itself" had brought on "the very collision he well knew would arise whenever Fort Sumter was attempted to be reinforced or provisioned." In November, Tyler was elected to serve in the Confederate House of Representatives. Far from becoming an elder statesman, John Tyler played a role in destroying the nation which had once elected him Vice-President.

Millard Fillmore despised Republicans as threats to the Union he loved and had once helped to preserve (by supporting the Compromise of 1850). In the secession crisis, he felt that the burden lay upon Republicans to give "some assurance . . . that they, . . . are ready and willing to . . . repeal all unconstitutional state laws; live up to the compromises of the Constitution, and . . . treat our Southern brethren as friends." Nevertheless, he disagreed with the cautious policy of lame-duck President James Buchanan, who felt that the government had no authority to "coerce a state." The men who passed ordinances of secession, Fillmore argued, should be "regarded as an unauthorized assembly of men conspiring to commit treason, and as such liable to be punished like any other unlawful assembly engaged in the same business."

Though no one knows how Fillmore voted in 1860, it is doubtful that he voted for Lincoln. It seemed awkward, there-

fore, when Fillmore was Lincoln's official host during his stay in Buffalo, New York, on the way to Washington for the inaugural ceremonies. Fillmore took him to the First Unitarian Church in the morning and at night to a meeting in behalf of Indians, but no one knows what they talked about.

When war broke out in April, Fillmore rallied quickly to the colors. Four days after the fall of Fort Sumter, the ex-President was speaking to a mass Union rally in Buffalo, saying that it was "no time now to inquire by whose fault or folly this state of things has been produced;" it was time for "every man to stand to his post, and . . . let posterity . . . find our skeleton and armor on the spot where duty required us to stand." He gave five hundred dollars for the support of families of volunteers and soon organized the Union Continentals, a company of men too old to fight. Enrolling Buffalo's older men of sub-

stance in the Union cause, the Continentals dressed in colorful uniforms, provided escorts for ceremonial and patriotic occasions, and provided leverage for procuring donations for the Union cause. Fearing British invasion through Canada to aid the Confederacy, Fillmore hounded the government to provide arms and men to protect the Niagara frontier.

Suddenly in February of 1864, Fillmore performed an abrupt about-face. In the opening address for the Great Central Fair of the Ladies Christian Commission in Buffalo, Fillmore rehearsed a catalogue of war-induced suffering and announced that "lasting peace" would come only when much was "forgiven, if not forgotten." When the war ended, the United States should restore the South "to all their rights under the Constitution." Republicans were outraged. The ex-President had turned a nonpartisan patriotic rally into a veiled criticism of the administration's conduct of the war.

Personally, Fillmore felt that the country was "on the verge of ruin." Without a change in the administration, he said, "we must soon end in national bankruptcy and military despotism." The ex-President, once a Whig and a Know-Nothing, endorsed Democrat George B. McClellan for the Presidency in 1864.

After Lincoln's assassination, Fillmore led the delegation which met the President's funeral train and escorted it to Buffalo. This did not expunge from Republican's memories Fillmore's partisan acts of 1864. Nor did it cool his dislike of Republicans. In 1869, he stated that it would be "a blessing to break the ranks of the corrupt proscription radical party, that now curses the country. Could moderate men of both parties unite in forming a new one . . . it would be well."

Among the five living ex-Presidents, none was more hostile to President Lincoln than Franklin Pierce. In 1860, he hoped



*From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum*

FIGURE 2. Millard Fillmore.

that a united Democratic party would choose Southern candidate John C. Breckinridge. The New Hampshire Democrats endorsed Stephen A. Douglas instead, but Pierce went along with the decision, though without enthusiasm. Lincoln's election was, for this Democratic ex-President, a "distinct and unequivocal denial of the coequal rights" of the states. In a letter written on Christmas Eve, 1861, Pierce urged the South to delay action for six months. If the North did not right the wrongs done the South, then she could depart in peace.

It was hoped that all of the ex-Presidents might attend John Tyler's Washington Peace Conference. Pierce declined, saying that "the North have been the first wrong doers and [he had] never been able to see how a successful appeal could be made to the south without first placing [the North] right." After news of Fort Sumter's fall, however, he reconsidered and wrote ex-President Martin Van Buren, suggesting that Van Buren assemble the former Presidents in Philadelphia to resolve the crisis. He spoke in Concord, New Hampshire, urging the citizens "to stand together and uphold the flag." Van Buren declined to call the former Presidents together and suggested that Pierce himself should. The wind went out of the sails of the idea of an ex-Presidents' peace convention.

Soon, Pierce lost his enthusiasm for the war effort. He made a trip in the summer of 1861 to Michigan and Kentucky to visit old political friends. On Christmas Eve, he received a letter from Secretary of State William H. Seward, then in charge of the administration's political arrests, enclosing a letter from an anonymous source which accused Pierce of making his trip to promote membership in the Knights of the Golden Circle, "a secret league" whose object was "to overthrow the Government." Seward unceremoniously demanded an explanation from the former President of the United States. Pierce indignantly denied the charge, Seward quickly apologized, and it was soon discovered that Seward had fallen for a hoax. An opponent of the Republicans had written the letter to show how far the Republicans would go in their policy of crying "treason" at the slightest provocation.

Pierce sank into despair. He loathed the proscription of civil liberties in the North, detested emancipation, and saw the Lincoln administration as a despotic reign. The killing of white men for the sake of freeing black men was beyond his comprehension. He thought Lincoln a man of "limited ability and narrow intelligence" who was the mere tool of the abolitionists. He stopped short of endorsing the Southern cause. Old friends avoided him, but Pierce swore never to "justify, sustain, or in any way or to any extent uphold this cruel, heartless, aimless unnecessary war."

At a rally in Concord on July 4, 1863, Pierce courted martyrdom. "True it is," he said, "that I may be the next victim of unconstitutional, arbitrary, irresponsible power." He called efforts to maintain the Union by force of arms "futile" and said that only through "peaceful agencies" could it be saved. Pamphlets compared Pierce to Benedict Arnold, but he persisted and urged the Democratic party to adopt a platform in 1864 calling for restoring the Union by ceasing to fight. Republicans did not forget his actions. New Hampshire provided no public recognition of her son's public career for fifty years after the war.

Martin Van Buren, alone among the ex-Presidents, gave the Lincoln administration unwavering support. He refused Pierce's invitation to organize a meeting of ex-Presidents out of a desire not to be associated with James Buchanan, whose course during the secession crisis Van Buren despised. He had confidence in Lincoln, based probably on information he received from the Blair family, Montgomery Blair being a Republican and a member of Lincoln's cabinet.

There was no more interesting course pursued by an ex-President than James Buchanan's. He had more reason than any other to feel directly antagonistic to the Lincoln administration. Like Pierce, Buchanan had been accused by Lincoln in 1858 of conspiring with Stephen A. Douglas and Roger B. Taney to nationalize slavery in the United States. As Lincoln's immediate predecessor in the office, Buchanan had succeeded in his goal of avoiding war with the South until the new administration came in. The price of this success was the popular imputation of blame on the weak and vacillating course of the Buchanan administration for not nipping seces-

sion in the bud. It was commonly asserted that Buchanan conspired with secessionists to let the South out of the Union. Lincoln's Vice-President Hannibal Hamlin, for example, felt that the Buchanan administration "connives at acts of treason at the South." Despite the findings of a Congressional investigation, many persisted in the belief that the administration had allowed a disproportionate share of arms to flow to Southern arsenals and a dangerously large amount of money to remain in Southern mints. When war broke out, feelings were so strong against Buchanan that he required a guard from the local Masonic Lodge in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to protect his home, Wheatland, from vandalism and himself from personal injury. President Lincoln did not help Buchanan's plight when, in his message of July 4, 1861, he charged that he found the following upon entering office: a "disproportionate share, of the Federal muskets and rifles" in Southern armories, money in Southern mints, the "Navy . . . scattered in distant seas," and Fort Pickens incapable of reinforcement because of "some quasi armistice of the late administration."

Such charges rankled Buchanan, and he spent much of the war years in a careful but quiet attempt to amass documentation which would refute the charges. By late 1862, he had written a book which accomplished this task (to his satisfaction, at least), but he delayed publication until 1866 "to avoid the possible imputation . . . that any portion of it was intended to embarrass Mr. Lincoln's administration." Buchanan's friend Jeremiah Black had doubted that Buchanan could defend his own administration without attacking Lincoln's:

It is vain to think that the two administrations can be made consistent. The fire upon the Star of the West was as bad as the fire on Fort Sumter; and the taking of Fort Moultrie & Pinckney was worse than either. If this war is right and politic and wise and constitutional, I cannot but think you ought to have made it.

Despite the many reasons for which Buchanan might have opposed the Lincoln administration, the ex-President did not. As far as he was concerned, the seceding states "chose to commence civil war, & Mr. Lincoln had no alternative but to defend the country against dismemberment. I certainly should have done the same thing had they begun the war in my time, & this they well knew." Buchanan did not think the war unconstitutional, and he repeatedly told Democrats that it was futile to demand peace proposals. He also supported the draft.

Buchanan considered it too late in 1864 for the Democrats to argue that Lincoln had changed the war's aims. He was pleased to see that McClellan, the Democratic candidate, thought so too. Lincoln's victory in the election, which Buchanan equated with the dubious honor of winning an elephant, caused Buchanan to think that the President should give a "frank and manly offer to the Confederates that they might return to the Union just as they were before." The ex-President's political views were as clearly nostalgic and indifferent to emancipation as those of any Democrat, but he was not among those Democrats who criticized the war or the measures Lincoln used to fight it.

Buchanan spoke of Lincoln in complimentary language. He thought him "a man of honest heart & true manly feelings." Lincoln was "patriotic," and Buchanan deemed his assassination "a terrible misfortune." The two men had met twice when Lincoln came to Washington to assume the Presidency, and Buchanan recalled the meetings fondly, remembering Lincoln's "kindly and benevolent heart and . . . plain, sincere and frank manners." When the Lincoln funeral train passed through Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Buchanan watched it from his buggy.

The ex-Presidents benefitted from the Revisionism of historians like James G. Randall. It was their work which rectified the generations-old charge that Buchanan trifled with treason. In some cases, however, this has been a distorting force. Randall's *Lincoln the President: Midstream* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1952) gives the reader an extremely sympathetic portrait of Franklin Pierce in keeping with Randall's view that most Democrats more truly represented Lincoln's views than his fellow Republicans. Thus Pierce appears as the victim of Seward's misguided zeal in the affair of the Knights of

the Golden Circle hoax and, in a particularly touching moment, as the friendly consoler of a bereaved father in the White House. In a horrible train accident immediately before entering the Presidency, Pierce and his wife had witnessed the death of their young son mangled in the wreckage of their car. Therefore, when Willie Lincoln died in 1862, ex-President Pierce sent a letter offering condolences. This is all one learns of Franklin Pierce in Randall's volumes on Lincoln's administration. It is useful to know of his partisan opposition to Lincoln and the war as well, and it in no way detracts from the magnanimity of his letter of condolence. If anything, it serves to highlight the personal depth of feeling Pierce must have felt for the Lincolns in their time of personal bereavement; it allows us even better to appreciate him as a man as well as a politician.

It is easy to forget that Presidents are men. This look at the ex-Presidents of Lincoln's day is a reminder that these men retained their personal and partisan views of the world. It would be hard to imagine an ex-President's club. Van Buren would have nothing to do with Buchanan, though both had been Democrats. Van Buren took the popular view that Buchanan was a "doughface" who truckled to the South instead of standing up to it as Andrew Jackson had done during the Nullification crisis. John Tyler remained a Virginian at heart and cast his fortunes with secession and against the country of which he had been President. Franklin Pierce and Millard Fillmore, the one a Democrat and the other a Whig in their prime,

retained a dislike of the Republican party. Fillmore supported the war with vigor but came to despair of the effort through suspicion that the Republican administration mishandled it. Pierce always blamed the war on Republican provocation and came quickly, and not without some provocation from the administration, to oppose the war effort bitterly. Ironically, James Buchanan, who labored under the heaviest burden of charges of Southern sympathies, was the least critical of the administration of any of the ex-Presidents except Martin Van Buren. Critical of Republican war aims like the rest, Buchanan, nevertheless, supported the war effort and maintained a high personal regard for his Presidential successor. Buchanan thus approached the twentieth-century ideal of an elder statesman.

Editor's Note: The Presidents of Lincoln's era have been rather well served by their biographers. Two splendid examples are Roy F. Nichols's *Franklin Pierce: Young Hickory of the Granite Hills* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1958) and Philip Shriver Klein's *President James Buchanan: A Biography* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962). Robert J. Rayback's *Millard Fillmore: Biography of a President* (Buffalo: Buffalo Historical Society, 1959) and Robert Seager, II's *And Tyler Too: A Biography of John & Julia Gardiner Tyler* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963) are useful. There is no careful study of Martin Van Buren's later life. The sketches of these Presidents here are based on these volumes.



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FIGURE 3. Lincoln and Buchanan did not meet again after this day.

FILLMORE: WILL NOT ADVISE LINCOLN!!!!

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